Existencilism



BANKSY

Welcome





Existencilism

I could sit in a pub and tell you all the things that are written in this book but you wouldn't fucking listen. It's better for both of us if I spend my time hiding in bushes waiting to spray little pictures on other people's property.

Nobody ever listened to me and I used to think that was their fault. Eventually I got to realise maybe it was the fact I was boring and paranoid that was the problem. But you find that people who know you rarely listen to a word you say, even though they'll happily take as gospel the word of a man they've never met if it's on a record or in a book. If you want to say something and have people listen then you have to wear a mask. If you want to be honest then you have to live a lie.

Being yourself is overrated anyway. It doesn't help. People say 'I'm just being myself' as if that's some kind of fucking achievement. That's not an achievement, that's not honesty, it's lack of imagination and cowardice.

Last year there was a story on the news that went 'A man arrested in Central London today was found to be carrying over a hundred British passports, twenty birth certificates and more than three hundred driving licenses. Police say they have not yet been able to identify the man...'



There are four basic human needs; food, sleep, sex and revenge.











Hackney, Southbank, Bristol, Berlin, Circus billboard Barcelona.



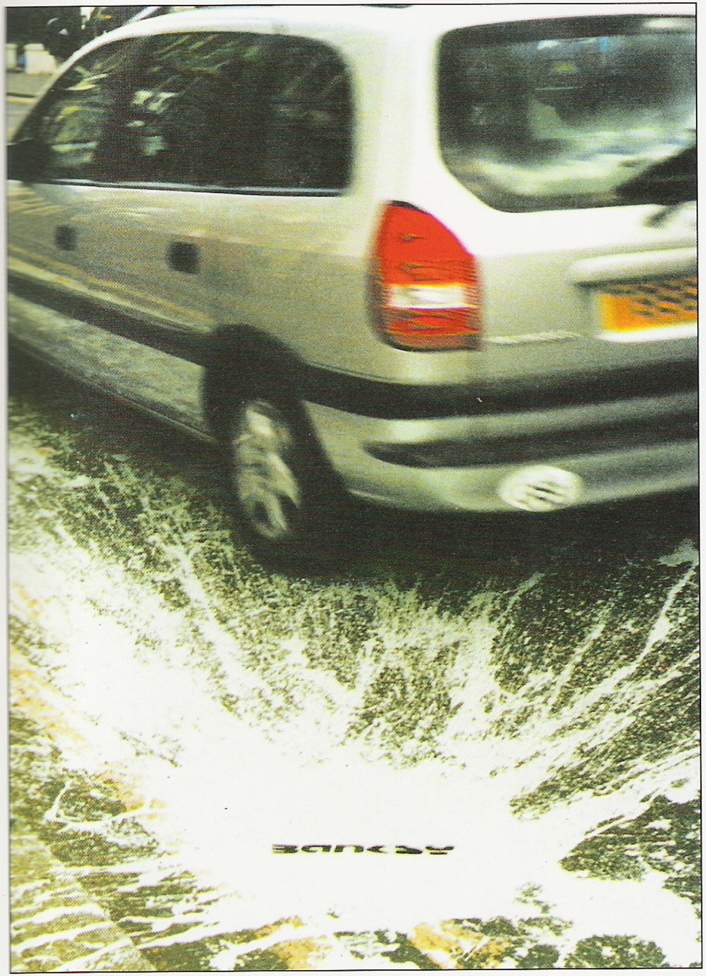








Bristol Golf Course, Ladbroke Grove, Nevada, Berlin, Shoreditch, Hackney.



'All artists are willing to suffer for their work.
But why are so few prepared to learn to draw?'



Painting something that defies the law of the land is good. Painting something that defies the law of the land and defies the law of gravity at the same time is really good.



Keeping it real

Once upon a time, there was a king who ruled a great and glorious nation. Favourite amongst his subjects was the court painter of whom he was very proud. Everybody agreed this wizzened old man painted the greatest pictures in the whole kingdom and the king would spend hours each day gazing at them in wonder.

However, one day a dirty and dishevelled stranger presented himself at the court claiming that in fact *he* was the greatest painter in the land. The indignant king decreed a competition would be held between the two artists, confident it would teach the vagabond an embarrassing lesson. Within a month they were both to produce a picture so glorious it would make grown men cry.

After thirty days of working feverishly day and night, both artists were ready. They placed their paintings, each hidden by a cloth, on easels in the centre of the great hall of the castle. As the large crowd strained to see, the king ordered the cloth to be pulled first from the court Artist's easel. Everyone gasped as before them was revealed a wonderful scene – a table set with a feast fit for a king, at the centre of which was an ornate silver bowl full of exotic fruits glistening moistly in the dawn light. As the crowd gazed admiringly, a sparrow perched high up on the rafters of the hall swooped down and hungrily tried to snatch one of the grapes from the painted bowl only to hit the canvas and fall down dead with shock at the feet of the king.

'Aha!' exclaimed the King. 'My artist has produced a painting so wonderful it has fooled Nature herself, surely you must agree that he is the greatest painter who ever lived?' But the vagabond said nothing and stared solemnly at his feet. 'Now, pull the blanket from your painting and let us see what you have for us,' cried the King. But the tramp remained motionless and said nothing. Growing impatient, the KIng stepped forward and reached out to grab the blanket only to freeze in horror at the last moment.

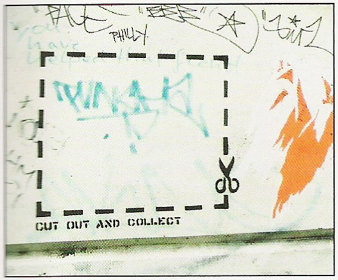
'You see,' whispered the tramp quietly, 'there is no blanket covering the painting. This is actually just a painting of a cloth covering a painting. And whereas your famous artist is merely content to fool Nature, I've made the King of the whole country look like a clueless little cunt'.

Source: man in a pub



Weston Super Mare



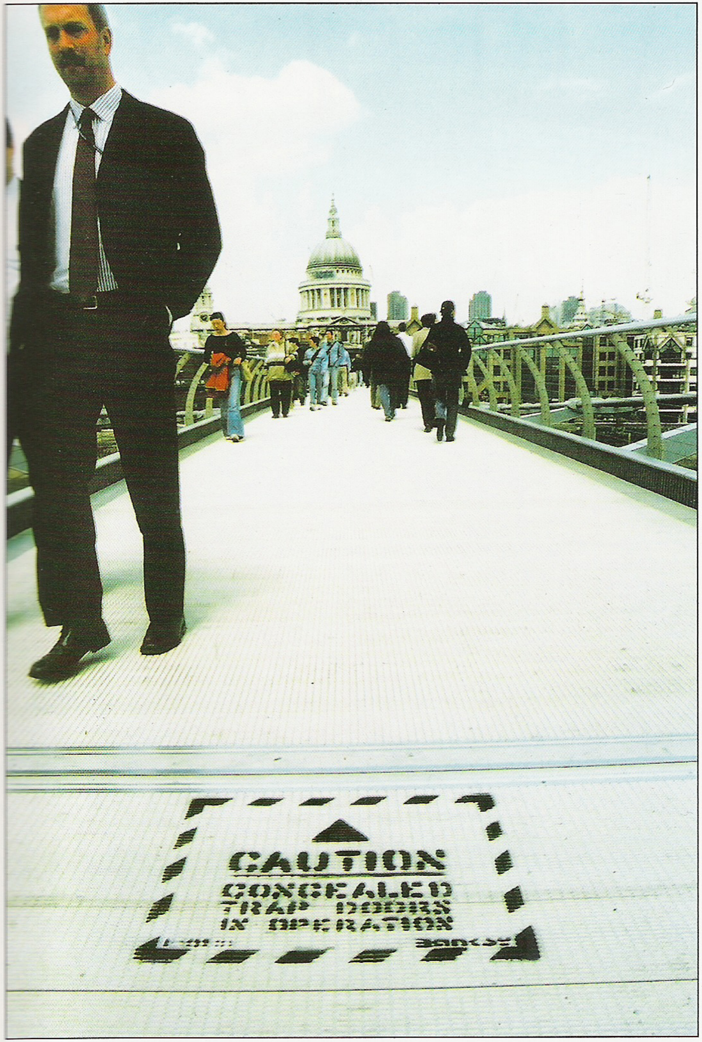


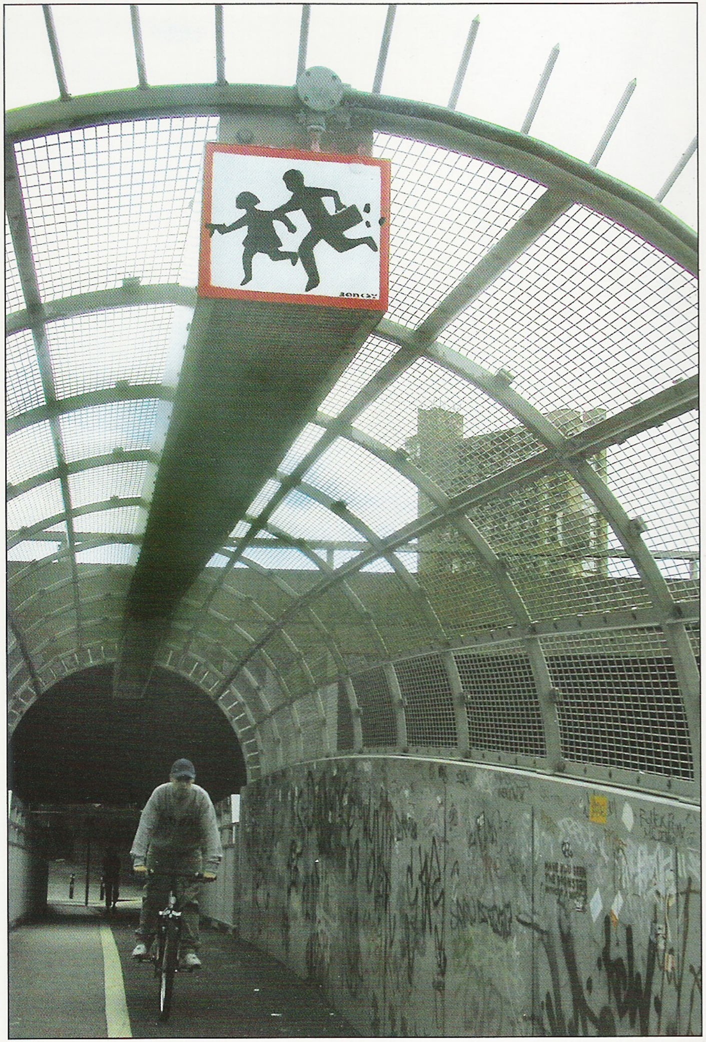
People think that cutting stuff up is destructive but it's actually a very creative thing to do because you're making loads of new stuff.

On my first day of work as a pork butcher the boss showed me a side of meat and said 'just treat the animal like you treat the ladies'. He then hacked off part of the rib cage with a swing of his cleaver, threw it in a polystyrene tray, pulled some cellophane tightly around it, bounced it off his knee and threw it over his shoulder into a bucket.

It turned out he hadn't had a girlfriend for over two years.

Like a troubled bridge over water.
Southbank, London.



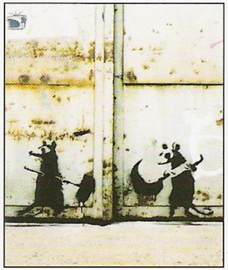


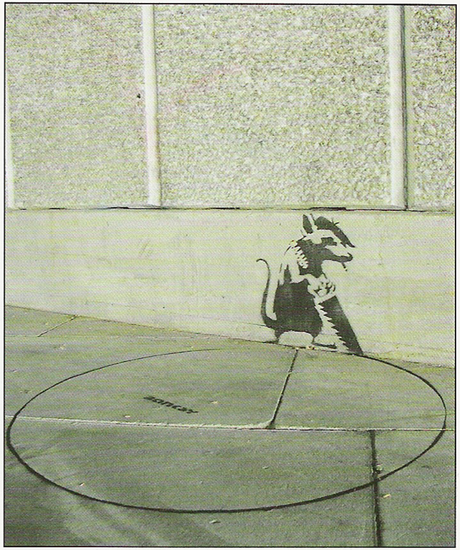


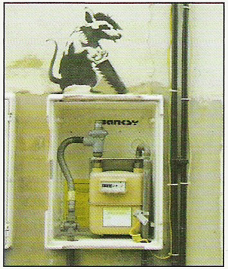
Bridge painting in murder mile, Hackney. Supposedly an area with more shootings per head than Soweto. I was concerned the piece was a bit too much like a legitimate sign and told my mate I thought it went over people's heads. 'It's not that it goes over people's heads,' he said, 'it's just that they all fucking ducked'.

Footbridge Westbourne Park, Trainbridge Kingsland Road Hackney.

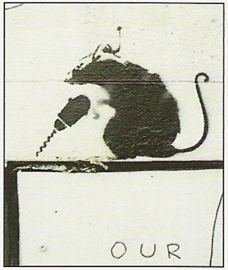








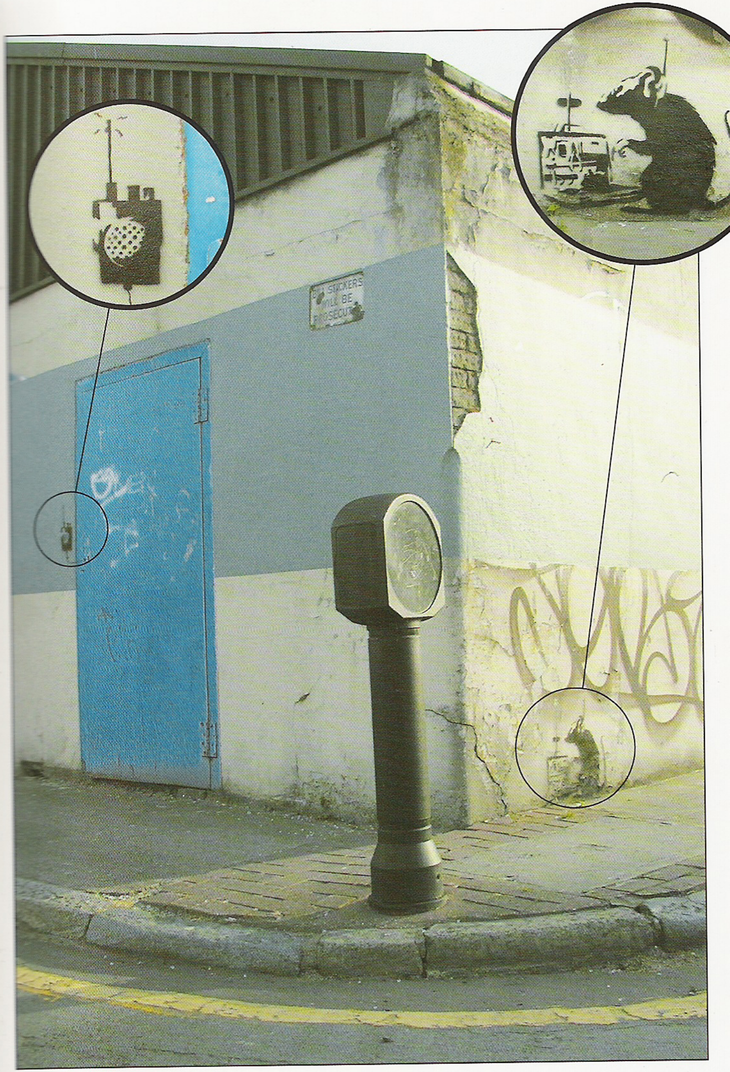




The Rat Pack

Like most people I have a fantasy that all the little powerless losers will gang up together. That all the vermin will get some good equipment and then the underground will go overground and tear this city apart.

Barcelona, Southbank, Whitechapel, Chelsea, Brick Lane, Berlin, Bethnal Green.



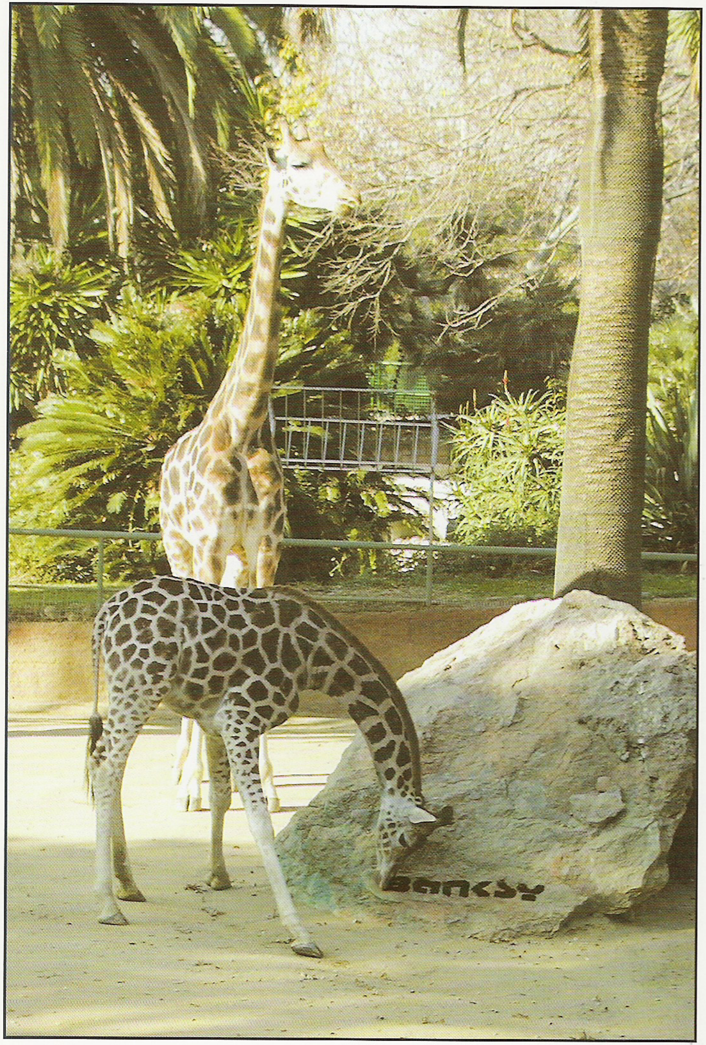
Rats are called rats because they'll do anything to survive.





I made the mistake of painting a rat on the front of a small jewellry shop once. It turned out the guy was a big time fence for all kinds of shit. He told the neighbours he had been marked as a grass by some family he'd never heard of and both his sons were out trying to find them and clear things up.

Everyone seemed to find this very funny.



The Zoo

It was a warm October evening when I jumped the fence into central park in Barcelona at three o'clock in the morning. What I didn't realise until then was the park which houses the zoo is also home to the Catalan parliament. It is exceptionally well lit, peppered with security cameras and patrolled by armed Guardia Civil in high powered jeeps.

I was creeping through the bushes at the edge of the park when the first patrol took me by surprise and I dived into the shrubbery a bit too late. The jeep slowed to a stop 100ft away and I crouched down trying to breath quietly, with my back against the outer fence of the zoo.

After a few moments no-one got out. Nothing happened. I was wondering if they were waiting for back up or had missed me altogether.

Zoo's are strange places at night, the animals make a lot of demented noises. Some sound like babies crying and some try to rattle their cages off their hinges.

As I crouched in my position, footsteps approached from behind. I wasn't sure if Spanish cops used their guns on people running away. The steps on the other side of the fence came very close and I could now hear heavy breathing. I turned to look through the fence but it was covered in so much ivy I couldn't see a thing.

The fear was properly on me. In my mind I was forming a story about how I was a penniless traveller with no hotel room sleeping rough in the park, and that I always carried 12 cans of spraypaint, a climbing rope and stencils with me. I held my breath, parted the ivy leaves, and came eyeball to eyeball with a fucking huge kangaroo. At which point I very nearly shit myself.

After a few minutes the Guardia jeep started up and drove away across the park. I crawled further down the fence and lay against a tree, smoking a cigarette and smiling at my stupidity. But a few moments later a loud hissing noise brought me round. I looked down the fence and heard another hissing noise and then saw a jet of water shoot out from behind a bush. Before I had a chance to move, a metal sprinkler at my feet exploded and sprayed cold water all over me.

I took off my trousers and tried to wring the water out of them thinking it was time to go home. But as I dried my crotch with a

large leaf I remembered a story I had read on the plane in my pocketbook guide to the Cuban revolution. It described how Jesus Suarez Gayol had rushed into a radio station in Pinar del Rio in broad daylight carrying a fused stick of dynamite in one hand and a pistol in the other. After removing the fuse he somehow caught himself on fire. Stripped to his underpants, with severe burns on his legs, he rushed out into the street, just as the building blew up, coming face to face with a policeman. Luckily for him the shocked policeman ran away. Then, still waving his pistol he ran down the street and leapt into an old woman's house. She happened to be a rebel sympathiser and hid and treated his wounds until he could be smuggled out of the province.

I had read this story and wondered why life always seemed to be happening to someone else. But it taught me what you are able to achieve without your trousers on. Within five minutes I had climbed both fences and was inside the zoo.

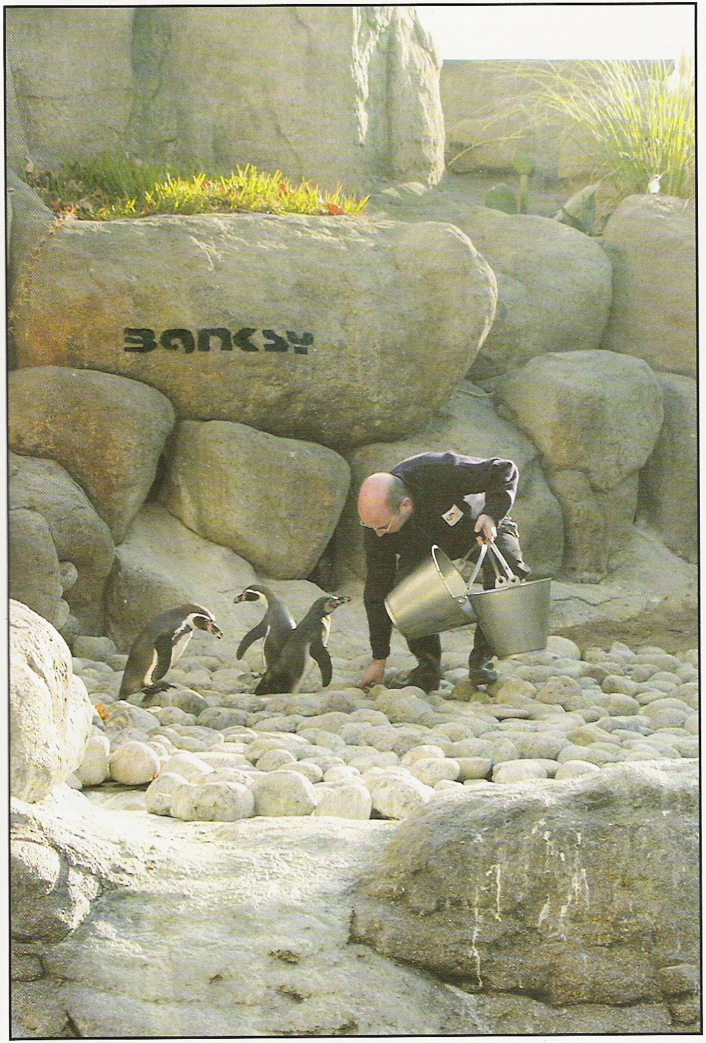
British zoo's helpfully have pictures of the animals on a board at the front of each enclosure. Barcelona zoo doesn't do this and I don't know any Spanish so I was taking extra care before entering each pen. I was moving at speed putting up tags on the penguin, giraffe, bison and gazelle enclosures before reaching my ultimate destination – the elephant house.

A Spanish kid had translated 'Laugh now but one day we'll be in charge' for me on a small piece of paper. I got the paint out ready to write this in three foot high animal-like handwriting across the back wall, only to realise I no longer had the piece of paper. Crouching next to a huge pile of dung my mind froze up.

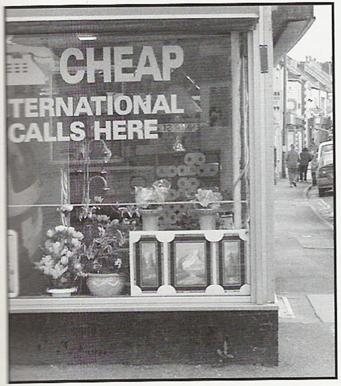
I can order lager in Spanish but not much else. I couldn't even think of how you would write 'Help us' in any language other than English. So I crouched there getting more and more miserable. For the next twenty minutes I went through all the possibilities, including writing stuff in English, but that seemed a bit rude. I checked my watch for the fifteenth time and then figured this was my best option – ticking off the time in classic jailhouse style 𝍸𝍸||.

So I weighed in five cans of fat black, scrawling this over every available surface of the entire enclosure. Then crept away quietly.

The following afternoon I didn't get any photos of the elephant enclosure. Emergency cleaners had been working hard on it. It's a very frustrated feeling you get when the only people with good photos of your work are the police department.









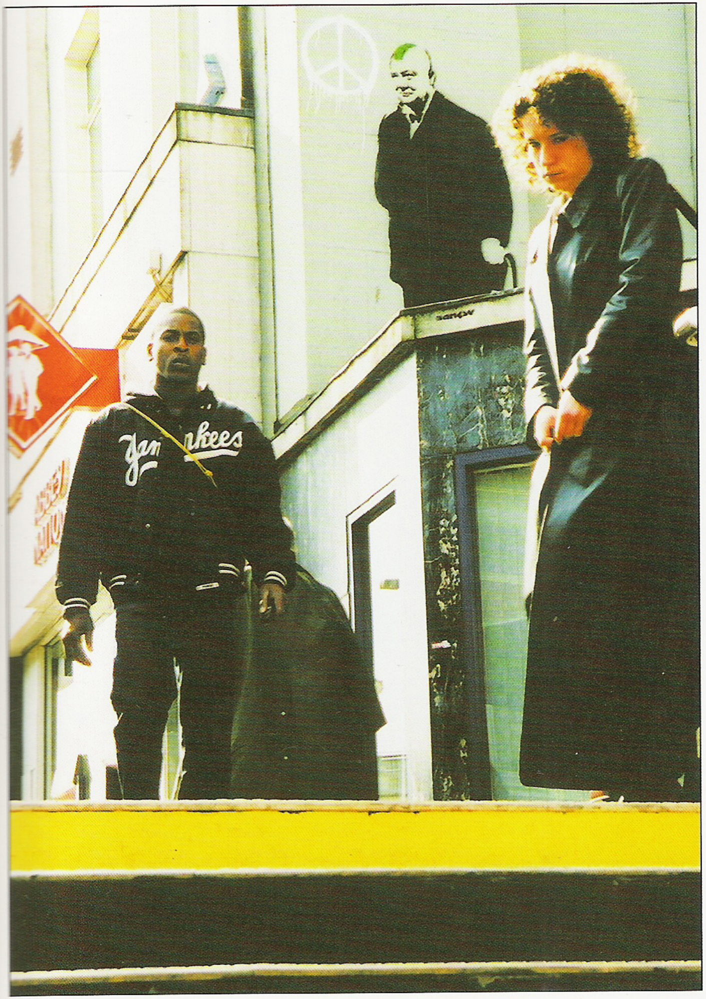
Some people thought a picture of Queen Victoria getting licked out was a bit too rude to paint randomly around a city. So I did quite a few and then they all got buffed pretty quickly. But one of them was on the shutters of a shop that sells total crap seven days a week. They don't shut until nine o'clock at night and only then do the shutters come down. This has given the stencil a kind of adult-only rating as it never gets seen before the nine o'clock watershed.

There's nothing more dangerous than someone who wants to make the world a better place.







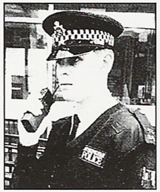


Maybe everything will be OK and there won't be a war



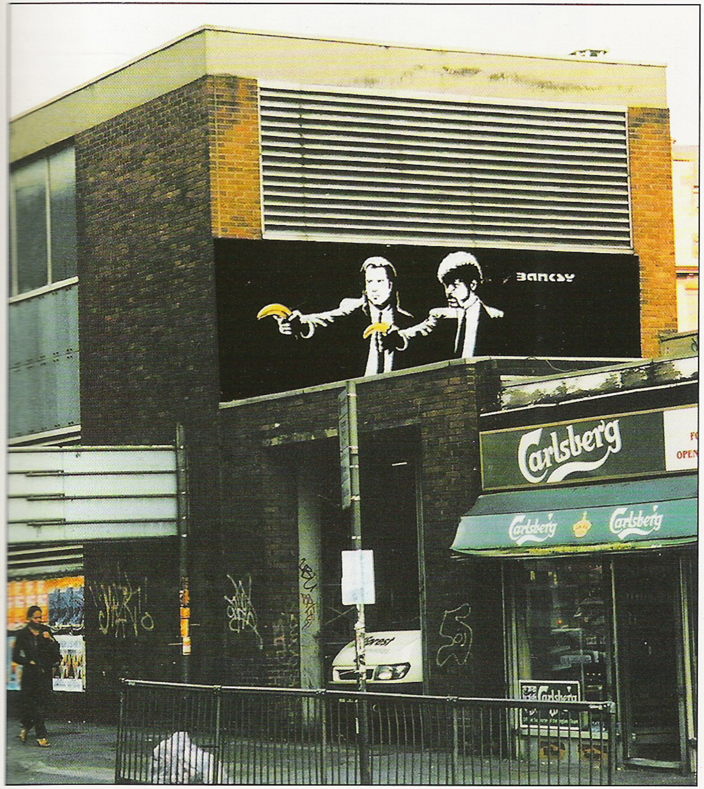
It's strange that the favourite drink of homeless people is called Tenants.





Policemen and security guards always wear hats with a peak that comes down low over their eyes. Apparently this is a psychological technique because eyebrows are very expressive, they let you down if you're lying or trying to bully somebody. You have far more authority if you keep them covered up.

The advantage of this is that it makes it difficult for your average cop to see anything more than six foot off the ground. Which is why painting rooftops and bridges is so easy.

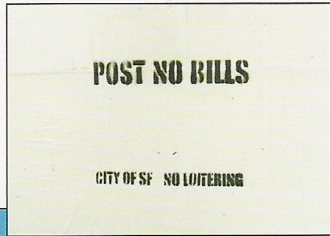


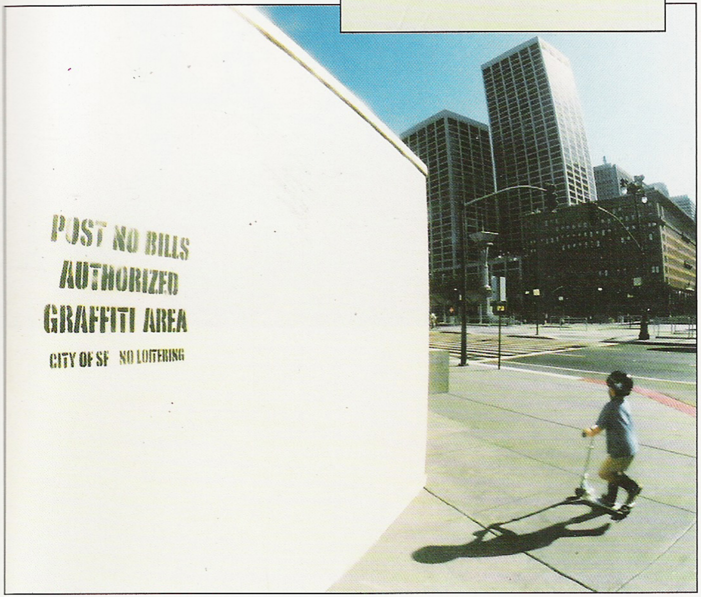


3am, San Francisco, Haight Street. By dribbling a can of paint from the top of a building I made a dubious looking rope and then stencilled a character underneath. After getting up the fire escape to drop a tag, my girl on lookout produced a camera, leant over for an action shot and suddenly there was a huge flash of brilliant white light because she forgot to turn her flash off. She shouts 'SHIT I'M SOOO SORRY' very loudly. The bouncers outside a club down on the street look up, one of them points at us, a guy walking his dog stops to look up and then a cab pulls in and the driver leans out the window to see what the fuss is all about and starts shouting in Spanish and beeping his horn. All the time I kept thinking of that phrase 'hip hop is not a spectator sport'.

On Tuesday I went round San Francisco dressed in overalls designating large parts of it as legal graffiti areas.

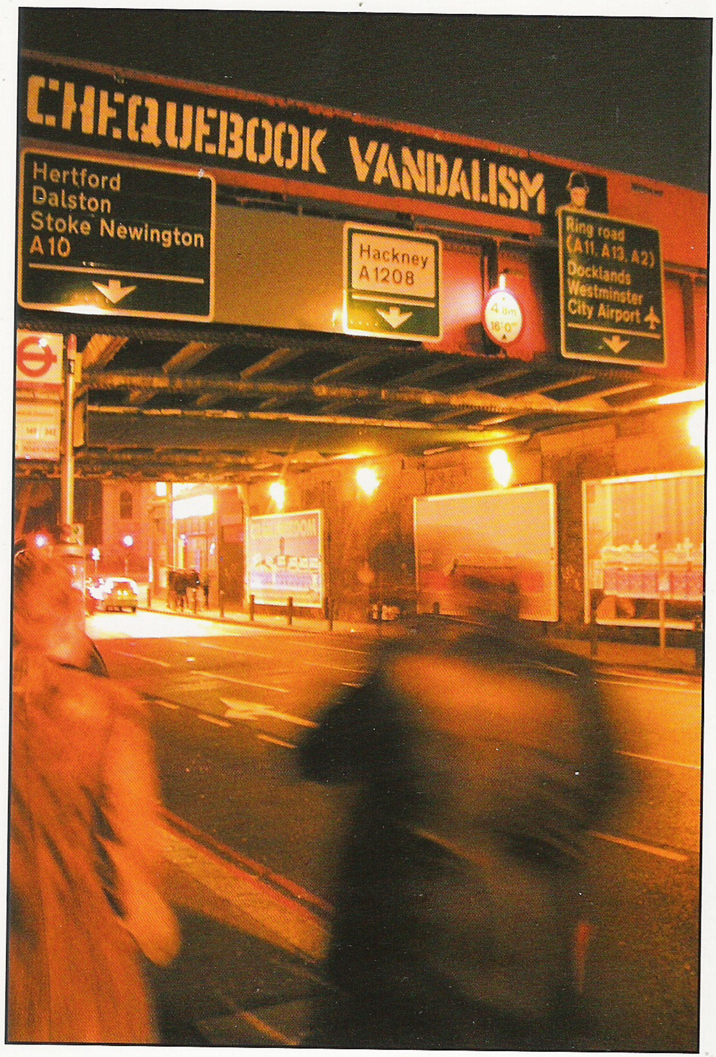
By Thursday nearly all of them had been adjusted by city workers with a simple lick of paint to mean the exact opposite.





You told that joke twice







Vandals

Twisted little people go out every day and deface this great city. Leaving their idiotic little scribblings, invading communities and making people feel dirty and used. They just take, take, take and they don't put anything back. They're mean and selfish and they make the world an ugly place to be.

We call call them advertising agencies and town planners.

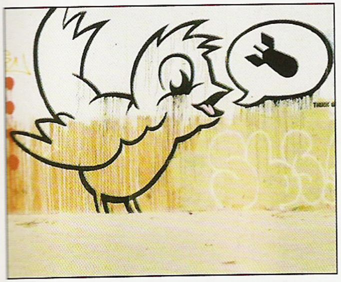
People say there is a graffiti problem. The only problem with graffiti is that there isn't enough of it.

Imagine a city where graffiti wasn't illegal, a city where everybody could draw wherever they liked. Where every street was awash with a million colours and little phrases. Where standing at a bus stop was never boring. A city that felt like a living breathing thing which belonged to everybody, not just the estate agents and barons of big business. Imagine a city like this and stop leaning against that wall – it's wet.

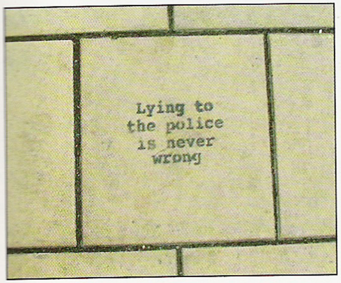














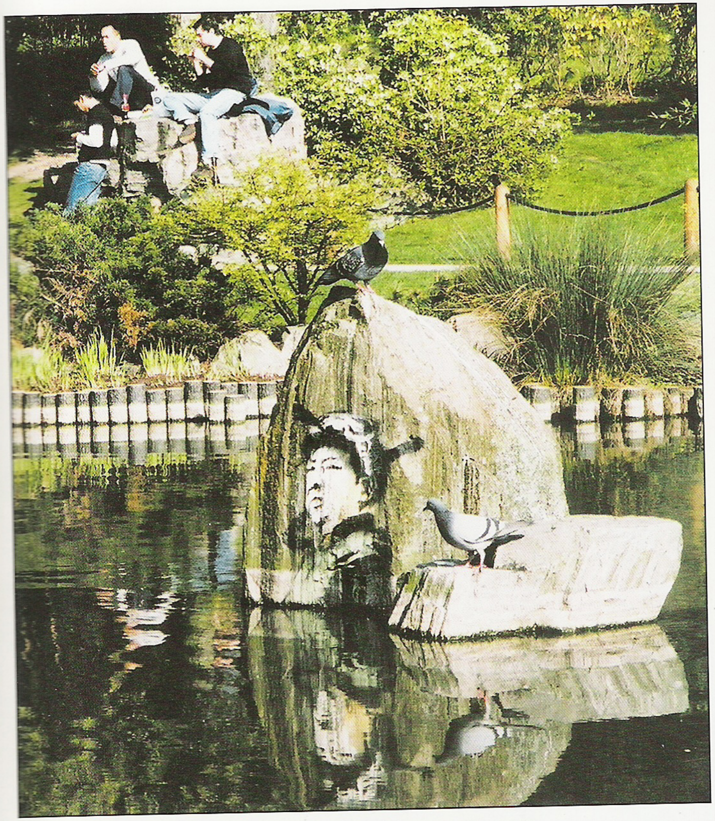
Dissent pays the rent.

Barcelona, Brick Lane, Camden, Nevada, Bristol, Hackney.









Can I come on Watercolour Challenge now please?

Chairman Mao surfacing in the Koy carp pond at the Chinese garden, Holland Park, London.



As far as I can tell the only thing worth looking at in most museums of art is all the schoolgirls on daytrips with the art department.

Souvenir hunting in the capital



Camp



MANIFESTO: CAMP

The liberation of Nazi death camp, Bergen-Belsen.

I can give no adequate discription of the Horror Camp in which my men and myself were to spend the next month of our lives. It was just a barren wilderness, as bare as a chicken run. Corpses lay everywhere, some in huge piles, sometimes they lay singly or in pairs where they had fallen.

It took a little time to get used to seeing men women and childen collapse as you walked by them and to restrain oneself from going to their assistance. One had to get used early to the idea that the individual just did not count. One knew that five hundred a day were dying and that five hundred a day were going on dying for weeks before anything we could do would have the slightest effect. It was, however, not easy to watch a child choking to death from diptheria when you knew a tracheotomy and nursing would save it, one saw women drowning in their own vomit because they were too weak to turn over, and men eating worms as they clutched a half loaf of bread purely because they had had to eat worms to live and now could scarcely tell the difference.

Piles of corpses, naked and obscene, with a woman too weak to stand proping herself against them as she cooked the food we had given her over an open fire; men and women crouching down just anywhere in the open relieving themselves of the dysentary which was scouring their bowels, a woman standing stark naked washing herself with some issue soap in water from a tank in which the remains of a child floated.

It was shortly after the British Red Cross arrived, though it may have no connection, that a very large quantity of lipstick arrived. This was not at all what we men wanted, we were screaming for hundreds and thousands of other things and I don't know who asked for lipstick. I wish so much that I could discover who did it, it was the action of genious, sheer unadulterated brilliance. I believe nothing did more for those internees than the lipstick. Women lay in bed with no sheets and no nightie but with scarlet red lips, you saw them wandering about with nothing but a blanket over their shoulders, but with scarlet red lips. I saw a woman dead on the post mortem table and clutched in her hand was a piece of lipstick. At last someone had done something to make them individuals again, they were someone, no longer merely the number tatooed on the arm. At last they could take an interest in their appearance. That lipstick started to give them back their humanity.

An extract from the diary of Lieutenant Colonel Mervin Willett Gonin DSO who was amongst the first British soldiers to liberate Bergen-Belsen in 1945.

Source: Imperial War museum

Your letters...

To: cashformonkeys@banksy.co.uk
Subject:
Thought i might offer you my services too. i'm a fly poster i work for xxxx around London all the time I have big ladders/a transit van and the will to disobey anywhere anytime, I'm trying to get into some billboard nobbling but the opportunities for the cut and paste job i did on this microsoft billboard are few and far between... Previously i had knobbled a coke billboard from 'life tastes good' to 'e tastes good' simple i know but it helps keep me sane..........
God bless you Dee

To: banksy@banksy.co.uk
Subject: well what do you know...
I've always liked what you do and hazard guesses as to why you do what you do and I think you're coming from the right place. Most people I know agree and you make us smile. However, there was always a fine line between what you do and vandalism. At the risk of being a bit of a Mary Whitehouse, I think you know what I mean. However, I was gutted to see what you have done on the Millenium bridge. I am tempted to get some people along and clean it up sometime soon. London does not get many things which are just right (this bridge took a while getting right, I know) and to fuck it up is like putting your mark on the Tate Modern. You aught to know what's what really. I always thought being selective and targeting the right (or wrong) was part of what separated you from the common "I think I'm an artist" wanker. Now you're just another pest and something that brings me down on my way to work to Southwark. "Caution... trapped door"?.........time to grow up.
Talin Gureghian creative leader

To: banksy@banksy.co.uk
Subject: Watch out where the huskies go and dont you eat that yellow snow...
Ummm, this might sound a bit weird but I TOTALLY need your help... Ok, there's a one in a million chance of you doing this, I've never met you, you don't even know me but you're my last hope!! there's this girl I really like, and it's her birthday this thursday (24 may). What I'm saying is, if you could possibly please (I'm begging you) do a stencil or anything at all saying something to do with her birthday, anywhere you like (But if possible as close to goldneye [in clifton] as you can) I would be ETERNALLY grateful. Her name's Becca and I know she would love this, it would be the ultimate birthday card.. Really, anything any size whatever, just if you're in the area (i think you live in bristol?) and you're bored it would just be the best thing ever.. That's it really, please think about it, if you do do it, could you please reply saying where it is... Thank you so much... adrian.

To: banksy@banksy.co.uk
Subject: sell out
Dear Banksy I'm really gutted that you did the posters for the electoral campaign, especially after all that stuff you wrote in your book about capitalism crumbling.
Yours disappointedly, Pierce 116.

To: pierce116
Subject: sell out
I did not do the posters for the election campaign. I did not do the posters for Nike. I did not do the posters for Lucozade. I did not do the posters for Lupo. Stencils are actually quite easy to make, you know.
Banksy.

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Dedicated to all people with a vicious disregard for common sense.



‘Superficially his work looks deep
but it’s actually deeply superficial.’

Evening Standard



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